

OTTAWA FREE PRESS AND EXETER.

SPEECH OF MR. WENTWORTH,

OF ILLINOIS, ON THE
IMPROVEMENT OF THE WESTERN WATERS.
Delivered in the House of Representatives,
January 9, 1844.

The immediate state of the question before the committee was as follows:

Mr. WISE had heretofore offered the following modified resolution:

"Resolved, That so much of the President's message as relates to the policy of attending to the lakes and rivers of the West be referred to the Committee on Commerce."

And Mr. THOMAS of Kentucky had offered the following modified amendment thereto:

"Resolved, That so much of the President's message as relates to the improvement of the western rivers and harbors upon the lakes be referred to a select committee of nine members."

And the pending question was on agreeing to the amendment as thus modified.

Mr. WENTWORTH rose and addressed the committee as follows:

MR. CHAIRMAN: As a representative from a State deeply interested in the improvement of three of the great western rivers, (the Wabash, the Ohio, and the Mississippi,) but from a district more immediately interested in the improvement of the lakes and all the northern frontier waters, I rise to ask a division of the amendment, since I believe the interest of the people is perfectly safe in the hands of the Committee on Commerce; and as an act of courtesy to my friends representing the riparian districts of the State, I am willing to give that branch of the amendment such a direction as may best suit them. Far be it from me to create any invidious discrimination between the interest of the northern frontier waters and those of the Mississippi and its tributaries. All I ask is, that the immediate representatives of each shall control the reference of their respective interests, both of which are common sufferers, and have been for the past five years—ever since the session of '38 and '39, when all appropriations for the West and Northwest, for the improvement of rivers, erection of light-houses, construction of harbors, and even for that great and useful national highway, (the Cumberland road,) begun with the plighted faith of the nation to complete it, were denied. The trivial exceptions to this assertion, gleaned by littles here and there, can have no effect upon its extent, when we consider the importance of the matter. All these great and imperative interests of the country have been most outrageously neglected. Too long—altogether too long—have the people of nearly half of our Union, from the disproportion of former representations on this floor, been knocking at the doors of Congress, making just and long-remembered complaints, and demanding their unquestionable deserts. Up to this time, they can scarcely be said to have had admittance, and relief has been administered to them only as crumbs thrown from the windows, as the waste of the prodigally lavished upon our army and navy. Why, sir, during the whole time of which I have been speaking, there has been expended upon our navy alone rising \$30,000,000; and when you seek for the advantages of all this, I tell you that you may as well seek the tracks which our ships have left on the ocean.

The President's message has represented our country at peace with all the world. Our flag proudly floats upon every sea, and is respected by every nation upon the habitable globe. On this very floor, too, we have established a "peace establishment," and no man has presumed to contradict it. Now, is all the money demanded for the use of our navy in the estimate of the necessary appropriations of the present fiscal year (\$9,000,000) requisite to our peace? All through the last war, when the gallant achievements of our navy gladdened every American heart, and won herself unfading laurels, the expenditures never were as high as the estimate for our present period of universal peace. The highest, in 1815, was only \$8,600,000, and the year before, only \$7,311,000. After the war, our navy expenditures fell down to \$3,000,000, and in 1832, to \$2,921,000. During Mr. Adams's administration, the average was three to four millions. Under General Jackson's administration, they were kept below four millions, in accordance with an oft-repeated recommendation of Secretary Woodbury. In 1835, with a plethora of treasury, they began to increase, and have been increasing ever since, until they reach \$9,000,000 by the present estimate. Now, if four millions had, enough under General Jackson, five and a population idly, to keep pace with the highest sum for which the friends of the improvements of our lakes and rivers ought to be able to provide. But they would give still additional aid to it. But it is not in a splendid government, nor in splendid armies and navies that they find the most safety. All this can be best secured by legislation for the necessities of the people, and so erecting government upon their most holy affections, by distributing its blessings equally to every section, navy contracts, and various other obstructions, within that time. And yet there has been \$300,000 appropriated to the improvement of the river and its tributaries, embracing a navigation of more than 12,000 miles, in the past five years—\$150,000 last year, and \$350,000 the year before. The average annual losses on the stream must reach \$1,000,000; and in one year, no less than 65 boats were lost from various "improvements" to its navigation.

The first appropriation was in 1824; and less than \$2,000 in all have been appropriated to it. I mean that part of the Mississippi—by which our country has been almost entirely neglected. This is navigable for 1,000 miles from the mouth of the St. Peter to the mouth of the Missouri—a distance of 650 miles above the junction of the Mississippi. And on its bed are to float, on their way to the great southern commercial emporium, not only the vast agricultural products of the fertile region, but the mines of the north. The principal obstructions to its safe navigation are sandy shoals, sunken logs, impending trees, sawyers, snags, and what will be the most difficult to overcome—about 25 miles of rapids. The first are the Des Moines rapids, 180 miles above the Missouri, extending through a distance of a little over ten miles. The second are the Rock Island rapids, 330 miles above the Missouri, extending 14 miles. These rapids are the most important obstructions to the safe navigation of the Mississippi, and it is the duty of the Congress to be primarily directed. But with a trifling outlay, compared with the mass of mineral and agricultural products which must pass over them every year, all difficulty and danger from them may be entirely obviated. And such improvements would not be local merely, but general; common to nearly half our country. In which I can imagine but few States where there is no probability of having an interest, immediate or remote.

I know it is said that the States along their banks should improve the Mississippi and its tributaries. But, have the States the power under the ordinance of 1787, which makes them public highways? What one State or person might consider an improvement, another State or person might consider an obstruction to the navigation of these streams, which is to be free. It certainly will not be contended that the States have a right to erect toll bridges over the Mississippi and its tributaries that bound different States. Yet, once concede the right in the States to improve them, and it will be difficult to define the extent of the operations which will be undertaken in the name of improvements. At best, the right of the States to improve (which, in some eyes, may be to obstruct) is very doubtful. If this right exists anywhere, it certainly does in the general government; and to that government I now present its claims, which are just and paramount, demanded by

to the navy, the richest additions have been poured forth upon our Atlantic sailors; and all very deservingly, for as I know. But in chivalric and patriotic feelings, lofty sense of honor and duty, collected spirits amid impending danger and death, our upper-lake seamen have no superiors on this mundane sphere. Mostly born within the roar of these ever-turbulent waters, their first lessons are in braving the storms and tempests, and setting the angry elements at defiance. They sail thousands of miles along an unprotected coast, without light houses, breakwaters, or harbors, with every cloud for a wreck. Unlike your Atlantic sailors, they do not rejoice at the sight of land, since it is ever before them. Their rejoicings are on the opposite extreme. They pray to be beyond the reach of rocks, reefs, and bars, which they seldom are. I could recount some of their daring exploits that would freeze your very heart's blood, could you but see a shadow of their awful reality. Take, for example, the story of the pilot of the burning boat, who stood at the wheel, directing her to the land, not only until the last passenger had been rescued, but until he himself was enveloped in flames, and died a victim to his own high sense of duty. When found, the flesh had burst from his hands, and the wood from the handles of the wheel; but there were the crisp sinews and the brittle bones grasping the iron, burnt almost to a cinder! A noble example of the sailor's valor!

In the fall of the year, many, very many of our vessels are driven ashore for the want of light-houses and harbors. But what are our intrepid mariners for this? As soon as the vessel strikes the beach, though thick darkness veils the night; though the gale shatters masts and rigging; though the mountain waves sweep the deck; though the iceicles dangle from their clothing—the stout-hearted tar falls not; but, tossing what of the cargo he can into the small boat, he jumps aboard, and then, sir, freezes as he tugs at the oar. The tongue of eloquence cannot give reality to such scenes of human suffering—cannot paint the hardship, the endurance, the interplay and devotion of our neglected seamen. I have witnessed many wrecks myself—wrecks not only of vessels and of cargoes, but of human life. And, on the day of my election, when I saw so many of these gallant spirits—monuments of God's sparing mercy—mere fragments, wrecks of men, (though with a sailor's noble heart still beating high within them,) with their canes and crutches, their cork legs and wooden arms, come up to deposit their vote for me, what else could I do but swear to devote all my energies to an amelioration of their condition, and to make a just and too long neglected representation of their full deserts on this floor? And when I hear the Atlantic sailor so stoutly praised, who sails about bays, beacons, breakwaters, well-constructed harbors and light-houses in the skies, or off in the high seas beyond the reach of rocks, reefs, or beaches, and that, too, under the protection of some of our various government squadrons, I cannot but, and without detracting from the high deserts of the one, call your attention to the long neglected merits of the other.

As a matter of fact, it appears to this House, that the poor fellows, numbering in the course of a year, quite a few thousand different persons, have not even a hospital provided for them, after having had their hospital money regularly deducted from their pay. In their sickness, distress, and want, they are the objects of common charity, though they regularly contribute their quota to the hospital fund. This, sir, is the very extreme of cruelty. I have already introduced a resolution inquiring in what manner this money is expended; and, before the close of the session, I hope to present a plan for the erection of such a much needed institution, from the sales of government property in the West, now going to waste. As I look upon it, we have not only treated this class of our citizens with neglect, but with great cruelty and downright extortion. We have robbed them to get treasures for our navy to rich from us.

It is the part of a wise man, when he finds himself unable to meet his liabilities, and bankruptcy impending, to cast his eye about for property which he can convert into cash, and for that property which he can keep to the last advantage, and render the most productive of a sinking fund, with which to liquidate his debts. We certainly should curtail the estimates for our navy. I believe \$5,500,000 would answer every emergency for this branch of our government. And then, sir, the most extravagant demands of the western rivers, including the Cumberland road and the northern frontier waters, would be satisfied with \$1,000,000—a sum superior to what all these interests have had within the past five years, whilst \$300,000,000 have been consumed by our navy. The great Mississippi, which washes the borders of seven States and two Territories. A population of 6,000,000 are directly interested in its trade—a trade which has amounted to \$250,000,000 the past season. Over \$1,000,000,000 (a sum but little less than the annual amount of all our foreign exports) of agricultural products alone have been exported over her bosom, interrupted with bars, snags, rocks, and rapids, and various other obstructions, within that time. And yet there has been \$300,000 appropriated to the improvement of the river and its tributaries, embracing a navigation of more than 12,000 miles, in the past five years—\$150,000 last year, and \$350,000 the year before. The average annual losses on the stream must reach \$1,000,000; and in one year, no less than 65 boats were lost from various "improvements" to its navigation.

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all productive property—of which the United States has a great abundance in its public lands, which are now being very slowly sold, and yield but very little revenue. Yes, sir, the once great land fund is fast dwindling into insignificance; but millions upon millions of acres yet remain unsold, from the parsimonious course of the general government in doling out improvements for the western country. People will not settle, from the difficulty of getting to market. They read of too much destruction of property, too great a sacrifice of human life on the great western waters, which comparatively a small sum would greatly improve. Again, they are afraid of high taxes. But what has Congress to do with these? It may be asked. Sir, it has much, very much, to do with them. It is Congress itself that is embarrassing the State of Illinois; and I will prove it. In that State there are no less than 35,235,208 acres. Our minimum valuation is \$3; and, to make up for any that may be reserved from taxes, we will average the whole at that sum, (a liberal estimate)—which will give real estate taxable to the amount of \$105,705,624. That amount, sir, that at this rate shall be sold long enough to become a valuable improvement and personal property in general will swell the amount to \$200,000,000, at the smallest computation. A tax of 2 mills on this would yield us an annual revenue of \$400,000. Now, what is the State debt of Illinois? When our arrangements now in progress are completed, (as there is every prospect to believe they soon will be,) the highest estimate is less than \$5,000,000—which would make our annual interest, simply, leaving 2 mills, assessed for State debt purposes merely \$100,000,000, do as a sinking fund; which annually would increase with the great increase of our property. This, however, is merely supposititious. Yet it shows our creditors abroad that there is another way for government to help us out of our difficulties than by an unconstitutional assumption. But what are the facts of the case?

The amount now taxable (that is, all that has been sold over five years) is but \$17,241,257.70, making one-half. The general government is paying interest merely \$100,000,000, do as a sinking fund; which annually would increase with the great increase of our property. This, however, is merely supposititious. Yet it shows our creditors abroad that there is another way for government to help us out of our difficulties than by an unconstitutional assumption. But what are the facts of the case?

Pursue this policy towards all the western States, and the result will be, that the best possible use of your productive capital.—This will fill both our national and our State treasuries. And this is our best means of getting out of debt, or raising our necessary annual revenue—far preferable, in the minds of the great mass of the people, to taxing tea, coffee, and the other necessities of life. Let the friends of assumption—those who talk so much about the western States becoming loaves—join the West in carrying out the bill now pending, and our States would be paying interest immediately.

I have thus shown, sir, how this money is to be got; and it would be for the national advantage to get to get, as it certainly would be to expend it. Having said thus much, no man can accuse me of being inimical to the improvement of the rivers, or the completion of the Cumberland road.

I now come to the main branch of my proposition, which is to divide the amendment. In the first place, sir, I will state, that I am not friendly to a special committee to take charge of any branch of this subject; because a select committee is always understood to be appointed to inquire into a subject, and to report upon some specific object, and therefore never has the weight in a recommendation that a standing committee does. I have confidence that the Committee on Commerce will do us justice; and that is a good maxim to "let well enough alone." But, if the more immediate friends of the river interest, who represent territory contiguous to any of our great western rivers, wish that interest referred to a select committee, (as I believe they do,) I certainly shall vote with them as an act of courtesy which I want all of you to do. I am not, however, in favor of a select committee, which we are willing that they should be the guardians of their own peculiar sectional interests, and have their select committee, we must claim the right of overlooking our own interests, and having our lakes referred to the Committee on Commerce, as they always have been, and as it is for their interest now to be. On this ground, sir, I must urge a division of the proposition; and, much as I am inclined to gratify my Mississippi river friends, I can never vote for the proposition in its present shape. As an act of courtesy to the gentlemen, and as a willingness to send their interests to any committee they wish, though I think they would be perfectly safe—that exact justice would be done them with the Commerce Committee. But they ask too much when they ask to have the lake interests taken with them. Sir, I have been opposed, all my life, to any log rolling system of legislation, which has been calamitous whenever adopted. I never can consent to see one great measure yoked to another, for the purpose of gaining strength. It is a poor device, and it is a poor device to the intrinsic merits. Both these great cardinal propositions of improvement have merits of their own, and upon them let each stand. In the hands of the Commerce Committee the lake interests are safe. From the composition of that committee, they could not be otherwise. Why, then, take them away from their usual place of reference? It is unkind thus to ask us to exchange a certainty for an uncertainty. For one, sir, I never will consent to jeopard the lake interests of the present generation, by the proposed reference, whilst my confidence in the proper standing committee is so limited that I know not where to look for a more favorable report. I watched the announcement of the committee with the greatest anxiety, and the moment I heard the names of its committee, my hopes were bright, and they have become brighter still from subsequent reports.

I would be less strenuous in this matter, as my anxiety to act with my western friends in all cases is very great, were not the claims of the northern frontier, embracing an extent of 2,000 miles and a lake coast of 5,000, so pressing. All the expenditures for lake improvements will not reach two and a half millions, whilst the expense of the Delaware breakwater alone has been three millions. The policy of protecting the Atlantic coast, originating with the first session of the American Congress, has been continued down to the present time, and is a loss to get at the precise amount of the millions upon millions which have been expended for bays, beacons, light-houses, breakwaters, and harbors there. I know that some make a distinction between the trade in that direction and ours, by calling one external, and the other internal. But, sir, that commerce more entitled to the name of external that goes from Boston, New York, or any other Atlantic city, to the old world, than that which goes from Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, or Buffalo, through the Welland canal and the St. Lawrence river?

I am sorry I have not the statistics of this portion of our foreign trade, to present to you; but I will collect them, and have them ready for another occasion; and I am confident that they will astonish many gentlemen on this floor who have regarded the lake trade as internal trade direct with St. Louis. Thus the whole western and northern trade is fast gaining a foreign nature, and is entitled to all the protection and encouragement emanating from the Atlantic cities, even though internal commerce were entitled to no protection, which I deny. Look to the history of our lake trade; and let the past be some indication of the future. In 1796 the American flag was first hoisted on Lake Erie, on board a small schooner of 70 tons.—In 1819, on Lake Erie, which now has 65, the first steamboat (Walk-in-the-water) made its appearance, and made a trip to Macine, to carry up the goods of the American Fur Company, and annually made her "long and arduous voyage" to the Ultima Thule of American navigation, until she was wrecked on the beach near Buffalo, in the month of November, 1821. With the greatest difficulty her place was supplied by the steamboat Superior, which has since been altered over into a small sail vessel—a pitiful contrast with the mighty Great Western, Illinois, or Wisconsin. But, in those days, I have no doubt the captains of the Walk-in-the-water and Superior strutted the deck, prouder of the extent and greatness of their command, than now do the weather worn and popular friends, Captains Walker, Blake, and Randall, now making their four-day trips from Buffalo to what were then parts unknown.—And those very straits, which were then visited but once a year by a steamboat, now have one every day. In 1826, steamboats first made their appearance on Lake Michigan on a pleasure excursion to Green Bay. In 1832, the necessity of the government, during the Black Hawk war, made her the first steamboat to make a trip to what is now the great granary of the West—the garden city, "utla in hara," where I have the honor to reside—a city not set on a hill, yet it will never be hid—a city this moment holding out greater inducements for investments in real estate than any in this broad country—a city that will one day alone have a member on this floor, and thus, more than one person now alive will live to see. In that year (1832) the first frame building was erected—The present Chicago was first laid out into lots. And, during this past season, in 1836, 300—Eleven steamboats on Lake Erie, and only three trips were made into Lake Michigan, one to Green Bay, and two to Chicago, when the erection of the first brick house was celebrated. In 1834, there were but eighteen boats in all on the lakes, making in the year two arrivals at Chicago and three at Green Bay. In 1836, the year of my first arrival in the State, the prairie fires overran what now composes the principal part of two of our wards. Its growth, since that time, can be best estimated from the following statistics:

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Exports. Imports.

1836,	\$1,000 64	1836,	\$325,203 30
1837,	11,005 00	1837,	373,697 12
1838,	10,641 75	1838,	579,171 61
1839,	33,443 00	1839,	630,980 26
1840,	228,635 74	1840,	562,106 20
1841,	348,302 24	1841,	564,347 88
1842,	639,305 20	1842,	664,347 88
1843,	1,005,207 60	1843,	1,433,886 00

The amount of tonnage employed in the Chicago trade the past season is 1,826,320.—Thus you see that the trade of Chicago alone, to say nothing of the value of the carrying vessels exposed to the peril of the lakes two and a half millions. And there is the trade of Green Bay, Milwaukee, Racine, Southport, Littleport, Michigan city, St. Joseph, mouth of the Kalamazoo, Grand Haven, Muskegon, and other ports, which will swell the amount as much more, to five millions. I here make no allowance for smuggling, which is extensively carried on for the want of a port of entry at Chicago, and which I have every confidence the present Congress will establish. To this, add the value of the shipping exposed, during the year, with the large amount of property taken by travellers, and not taken account of at our ports, and \$10,000,000 is a low estimate for the amount of property exposed on Lake Michigan alone during the year. Then consider the vast number of human lives (seamen and passengers) continually in jeopardy, and the importance of good harbors and light-houses will be manifest. From Detroit to the head of Lake Michigan, over eight hundred miles, (embracing a coast of over two thousand miles,) there has not been the first harbor completed. Harbors have been begun at Chicago, Michigan city, and St. Joseph, but were abandoned, with all the rest, at the session of 1828 and '39. And in 1810, insult was added to injury, by selling out our improvements. Our partly-constructed works were thus permitted to decay, until the last session, when my much respected friend, the delegate from Wisconsin, got an appropriation for three towns in the Territory through this body; which was amended in the Senate so as to give Michigan \$200,000, and Chicago and St. Joseph \$25,000 each. 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